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Alfred Thayer Mahan and the Making of the Superior Other

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Alfred Thayer Mahan and the making of The Superior Other

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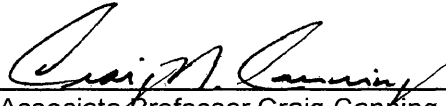


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ABSTRACT PAGE

At the turn of the twentieth century, many white Americans struggled to fit the Japanese into their social evolutionary models. Having been raised to believe that the title of civilized was exclusively reserved for members of the white, Western world, white Americans were unsure of how to classify the inhabitants of the newly modernized Japanese state.

Many Americans attempted to redefine the Japanese to fit their understanding of what a civilized nation was, either by reclassifying them as a white, Christian nation or dismissing the modernization efforts of the Japanese as inadequate proof that they were an equal of the civilized West. The American navalist Alfred Thayer Mahan was among the few white Americans who were willing to challenge the notion that social evolution was a linear, uniform process that began with races living a state of savagery and ended with them emerging in a society that mirrored Victorian England or Gilded Age America. Instead Mahan believed that Japan had emerged as a "Superior Other," a modern, civilized, Asian nation that melded Eastern culture with Western knowledge. Mahan saw America's foreign policy towards Japan as a vehicle to define the rights and responsibilities of this new form of civilization.

While Mahan originally hoped to shape the Japanese into an ideal American ally in the East, helping to keep China from being partitioned into spheres of influence by European imperialists, by 1905 he worried that America lacked the capacity to do so. Japan believed that its victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 was proof that it had emerged as an equal of the other civilized nations of the West, and demanded that it be treated as if it were any other Western state. Mahan feared that Japan would use the knowledge and technology it had acquired from the West to attack the West to when Japan felt it was not being treated as a civilized nation should. Mahan's contributions to the Strategic War Plan of 1911, that laid out America's course of action in a war against Japan, demonstrate how he believed America would help define the rights of the Superior Other. America would have to defend militarily any rights it was unwilling to concede to the new Japanese civilization.

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To Ormi, Steph and Mao

"Japan, like China, is Asiatic; the appreciativeness and energy with which she has embraced European standards and ways are a favorable omen, giving perhaps the surest promise as yet in sight that these shall pass into the Asiatic life and remodel it, as the civilization of Rome passed into the Teutonic tribes. But the result in the latter case has been a Teutonic civilization, not a mere extension of that of Rome. So here, what we have to hope for is a renewed Asia, not another Europe."

- *The Problem of Asia and its
Effect upon International
Policies*, Alfred Thayer
Mahan¹

When the naval theorist and historian Alfred Thayer Mahan set foot on the shores of Japan in 1868, he believed he was entering into a society where progress had ground to a halt. Fearing that Western influence would weaken its hold over the Japanese state, the Tokugawa government had effectively closed the country off from the Western world in the 1630s. Japan had been relatively untouched by the scientific and political revolutions that had swept across the Western world in the following two centuries, which meant that it was ill-prepared to meet the challenge of the four steam ships of the American Navy that entered Edo Bay in July of 1853. The weaponry of the samurai was no match to the armaments of the American military, and the nation was forced to open itself to the trade of Western goods and ideas. In 1868, when Mahan was assisting in the opening of Japanese treaty ports, he marveled at the barbarity of the Japanese people he encountered. Their customs and costumes seemed to him bizarre; the goods they traded were inferior to anything found in European or American shops. Even the samurai failed to impress Mahan, as they looked like children at play. While he was aware of the political turmoil that was sweeping the country, and witnessed some of the battles that brought down the

¹ Alfred Thayer Mahan *The Problem of Asia and its Effect upon International Policies* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1900), 109-110.

Tokugawa government, Mahan doubted that the new Meiji government could truly reform the state. When he left the country in September of 1869 Mahan reasoned that Japan would remain barbaric for the foreseeable future.

Yet like most white Americans, Mahan was amazed when Japan emerged as a modern regional power at the turn of the twentieth century. In the years following Mahan's departure, the Meiji government had urged the Japanese to seek out knowledge from the wider world. In the span of a generation, Meiji reformers had remodeled the country after the civilized nations of the West. Japan established a bicameral legislature and a constitution in 1889. Factories began dotting the Japanese landscape as the nation began the process of industrialization. Travel and communication between cities was made possible by the railways and telegraph lines that criss-crossed the country. The bakufu's army of samurai had been replaced with a military staffed by recruits from all ranks of society and equipped with Western armaments. The new armed forces proved to be a formidable foe when it defeated the much larger Chinese military in the first Sino-Japanese War in 1895, and acquired for Japan territories, including Taiwan, and access to the Chinese market. Mahan was among the many Americans who were astonished by the progress the Japanese were making, and believed that in many respects Japan was beginning to resemble a modern, Western nation. Yet Japan left them with a sense of unease, as they were unsure where this non-white, non-Christian regional power now fit in the global order.

This thesis explores Mahan's intellectual and cultural engagement with modern Japan. It aims to offer new insight on America's growing engagement with Japan during since the second half of the 19th century. Historians have typically described America's

attempts to negotiate Japan's place in the global order in terms of a clash. One group of scholars have portrayed the rifts between the U.S. and Japan from an economic standpoint. According to revisionist historians of U.S.-foreign relations like Walter Lafeber and William Appleman Williams, Americans saw their early relations with Japan as a clash of contrasting economic models. They believed that America's transpacific expansion since the mid 19th century and Japan's rise as a modern power inevitably led the two nations into conflict. America was, in Appleman's words, a "sprawling, pluralistic, open-ended society that (was) terrified of economic depressions and sought to avoid them by creating an open international marketplace."² Northeastern China was a major part of this international marketplace. When the newly industrialized Japanese state began expanding into Manchuria around the turn of the century to acquire the raw materials and markets necessary to feed its economy, America feared that Japan would block American access to the region. The clash between the two nations stemmed from a dispute over whether Manchuria would be a marketplace open to all interested powers or a Japanese sphere of influence.³

Another group of scholars have viewed transpacific history as a clash of military and strategic ambitions. They sought to understand how and why the United States and Japan would eventually go to war in 1941, and have examined the military strategies and national security policies of the two nations. Historians Akira Iriye and Ronald H. Spector have explored how tensions over Japanese immigration to America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries led to the development of military strategies by

² Walter Lafeber, *Clash: U.S.-Japanese Relations throughout History* (New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 1997.) xviii. Walter Lafeber *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion 1860-1898, Thirty-fifth Anniversary Edition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998) 85-92.

³ William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy: Twenty-five Years After* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1972) 73-80. Lafeber, *Clash: U.S.-Japanese Relations throughout History*, 96.

both nations. America's Strategic War Plan of 1911 and Japan's Naval Plan of 1907 emerged out of a fear that actions like the American annexation of the Hawaiian islands in 1898, which was done largely to stem the flow of Japanese laborers there, and the mistreatment of Japanese migrants on America's west coast in the early twentieth century would eventually cause a war to break out between the two nations.⁴ While an early twentieth century war between the two nations never materialized, the tensions over Japanese immigration were allowed to simmer and eventually contribute to the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941.

In recent years, a growing number of historians have focused on the cultural aspects of American-Japanese relations, arguing that the two nations were involved in a clash over the concept of civilization.⁵ Japan wanted the title of civilized nation, as it believed that this would help them reacquire the respect and sovereignty they had lost when their country was pried open in 1853. Americans, in contrast, were raised on intellectual diets consisting of social Darwinism, scientific racism and Anglo-Saxonism, all of which led them to believe that civilization was exclusive to the white, Christian nations of the Western world. When Japan emerged as a modernized nation at the turn of the twentieth century, most Americans struggled to place the Japanese in their social evolutionary hierarchies. Charles Neu, Joseph Henning, and Rotem Kowner argued that many Americans, were willing at first to ignore Japan's racial and religious "deficiencies" and embrace them as civilized due to their willingness to adopt Western institutions and technologies. They believed that Japan could serve as both a model for

⁴ Akira Iriye "Japan as Competitor, 1895-1917." *Mutual Images: Essays in American-Japanese Relations*. Akira Iriye, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975.) 73-78. Ronald H. Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun: The American War With Japan* (New York: Vintage Press, 1985.) 44.

⁵ Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 72 Issue 3. (Summer 1993), 22-49.

the other Asian states, and a partner in the remaking of an Asia free of imperial spheres of influence and other barriers to American trade. Yet when Japan began to develop policies that conflicted with American values or interests, Americans simply reclassified them as uncivilized. They argued that while Japan may have adopted Western institutions and technologies, the country had failed to embrace the true values of the West and were thus uncivilized. The two nations clashed over the concept of civilization, namely whether a modern Asian state with its own political agenda could be the social evolutionary peer of the white, Christian nations of the West.⁶

This thesis builds on the work of the third group, arguing that America's cultural perceptions of Japan were more heterogeneous than the works of these cultural historians imply. This work explores the writings of Alfred Thayer Mahan, a neglected figure who played a key role in shaping America's cultural perceptions of Japan. At the turn of the twentieth century Mahan believed that Japan was emerging from a social evolutionary process that the advocates of scientific racism, social Darwinism, and Anglo-Saxonism could not explain. If genetics and civilization were linked, as scientists like the patrician Samuel Morton and the craniologists Paul Broca argued they were, how was it that the Japanese had undergone such a radical social transformation without undergoing a similarly radical physiological change? Could advocates of Herbert Spencer's theory of recapitulation, which included the belief that primitive societies were living representations of earlier stages in social evolution and that they were frozen into these stages, explain how Japan had seemingly skipped several stages of evolution in the span

⁶Joseph Henning. *Outposts of Civilization: Race, Religion and the Formative Years of American-Japanese Relations* (New York: New York University Press, 2000) 169-70. Rotem Kowner. " 'Lighter Than Yellow, but Not Enough': Western Discourse on the Japanese 'Race', 1854-1904" *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 43 No. 1. (2000.) 105. Charles E. Neu. *The Troubled Encounter: The United States and Japan* (Malabar: Robert E Krieger Publishing Co., 1987).

of a generation? And was it rational for the Anglo-Saxonists to expect that societies that were shaped by vastly different historical experiences from the “civilized” Anglo-Saxon race would somehow emerge as another Victorian England or Gilded Age America? When Mahan failed to receive adequate responses to these questions, he developed a competing social evolutionary model that stated that Japan was emerging as a new type of civilization that merged Eastern culture with Western ideologies and technologies, a *Superior Other*. The policies he advocated between 1900 and 1914 reflected Mahan’s attempts to define the role that this new civilization would have in the global order.⁷

This work divides Mahan’s attempts to shape American foreign policy into two parts. The first part, comprised of the first three chapters, traces the evolution of Mahan’s social evolutionary beliefs, from his early years through to the development of his *Superior Other* thesis, to the onset of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. The policies he advocated up until 1905 reflect the fact that he believed it was in America’s best interests to shape Japan through soft power. He urged his contemporaries to involve Japan in an economic alliance in Asia that would grant the Asian state the status of a civilized peer, while protecting and furthering American interests in the region. Mahan also called for the end of Japanese immigration to America, as he doubted that the Japanese were capable of fully assimilating into Western society until they embraced the values and norms of Western culture. He believed that these incentives, as well as the fact that Japan lacked the military and economic capacity to develop and implement its own foreign policies, would turn the Superior Other into a valuable American ally in Asia.

⁷ Stephen Jay Gould. *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996). 112-121, 142-151.

The second part begins with Mahan's response to the events of 1905. When America failed to develop Mahan's proposed alliance, and Japan emerged victorious in the Russo-Japanese War, Mahan became worried. Japan began challenging the established order in Asia by carving out a sphere of influence in Korea and northern China, and began demanding rights for its citizens abroad. What was especially troublesome to Mahan was the fact that Japan now had the military capacity to enforce these demands. Mahan's most meaningful contribution to American-Japanese relations after 1905 was to the Strategic War Plan of 1911, which described American strategy in a war with Japan. If America could not define the rights the Superior Other would have through soft power, it would limit the rights that Japanese would take by military force.

I.

Alfred Thayer Mahan was born on September 27, 1840 in West Point, New York, where his father served as the Dean of Faculty and a Professor of Civil and Military Engineering at the West Point Academy. While born in the North, Mahan was instilled with what can best be described as Southern values. He was the grandson of Irish immigrants who settled in Norfolk, Virginia around the turn of the nineteenth century, and who quickly appropriated the sense of superiority held by upper class whites in Southern society. Mahan was encouraged by his family to have a sense of contempt for the "lesser-civilized" peoples of the world, especially America's black population. As a proud Virginian, Mahan was raised to take pride in the American South and its "peculiar" institution, slavery. His father taught him to view blacks as little more than mere chattel, and even went so far as to send Mahan to Maryland when he was 12 years old to witness the wonders of a slave-owning society. Mahan eventually developed contempt for

America's black population, as he rarely ever referred to them in his early letters and journals as anything other than "niggers" and "darkies." Mahan believed that blacks lacked the sophistication of their white counterparts. While whites had developed into the wealthiest and most scientifically advanced nation on earth, blacks had languished in barbarity.⁸

Mahan had very little exposure to the institution of slavery during his childhood. While his father had taught him that Blacks were plucked from their "savage" state in Africa to be used by whites in America as "tools," subhuman instruments that performed menial tasks for the betterment of their white masters, he had very rarely seen the harsh conditions under which most American slaves toiled. Prior to the American Civil War, Mahan's encounters with slavery were limited to the few times he had met black house servants when he traveled to Maryland. Mahan saw nothing wrong with the use of blacks as slaves, given their inferior status, and what he understood to be fair treatment by their white masters. He even wrote that on one occasion in 1858 that while out sailing, Mahan had ordered "some darkies... to get out sweeps (oars) and drag us into shore" when there was not enough wind to fill the ship's sails.⁹ Mahan saw nothing wrong in ordering blacks to perform menial labor.

Mahan's views on slavery changed during the American Civil War. Despite his sympathies towards the South, Mahan fought for the Union as a lieutenant. He did so as he believed that he was fighting to reunite the fractured country, and not to bring about

⁸ Alfred T. Mahan. *From Sail to Steam: Recollections of Naval Life* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishing, 1907), xiii. Alfred T Mahan, "Letter to Samuel A. Ashe, Naval Academy, December 12, 1858" *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume I: 1847-1889* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1975), 33.

⁹Mahan, "Letter to Samuel A. Ashe, Naval Academy, April 18, 1859," *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume I: 1847-1889*, 77.

the end of black bondage. Yet Mahan shed the reverence that he held towards the South's "peculiar institution" early on in the war, when he came upon a number of blacks from South Carolina fleeing their plantations. Mahan was shocked at their treatment by their white owners, and disturbed by their "cowed, imbruted faces." He favored slavery's abolition as it was abuse and not the noble act imposed on blacks by a superior white civilization. He soon learned that his father had also become an abolitionist after seeing the conditions America's slaves endured.¹⁰

His view of blacks as inferiors, however, would persist. Mahan's father had bred in him a great distrust of all who would try to elevate freed blacks above what Mahan believed was their proper ranking in the ordering of the races. He had extreme misgivings about the post-war Reconstruction plans of Republicans. Mahan believed that giving blacks the same rights as whites was a mistake, as was treating blacks as if they were as capable as whites were. He would later write, "the great mistake of (abolitionists and proponents of Reconstruction) was the unconscious assumption that the negro was a white man with the mistake of black skin."¹¹ Congress could not overcome the inferiority of blacks merely by passing legislation declaring them the equals of whites; Mahan thought it was folly for the government to try to overturn the natural order of the races. The integration of institutions that were exclusively white before the war particularly disgusted him. When the West Point Naval Academy admitted a black student in the 1870s, Mahan simply could not understand what the upshot was of having a "nigger

¹⁰ Mahan, *From Sail to Steam*, 91, 92.

¹¹ Alfred Thayer Mahan, "Letter to the Editor of The Times, Quogue, Long Island, circa June 13, 1913." *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume III: 1902-1914*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1975), 498.

cadet” there.¹² While the war may have abolished slavery, Mahan did not believe that it had abolished the inferior status of America’s black population.

Exposure to other races abroad did not alter Mahan’s white supremacist views. When offered the opportunity of traveling to Japan in 1867, Mahan eagerly accepted, even though he had never expressed a genuine interest in learning about the nation.

Mahan knew little, if anything, about Japan when he boarded the USS *Iroquois* on New Year’s Day, 1867. He was looking to escape the doldrums of the Washington Navy Yard, searching for the adventure that his naval career had lacked up to that point. Mahan’s experiences during the American Civil War were uneventful, stationed “where the fighting was not.” He divided his time between 1861 and 1865 between sailing aboard the USS *Pocahontas* that rarely ever saw action, teaching at the Naval Academy that had been relocated to Newport, Rhode Island, and enduring another “five boring months as first lieutenant” aboard the USS *Seminole* stationed off the coast of Texas.¹³ His time aboard the USS *Pocahontas* in the Fall of 1861 was characteristic of the rest of Mahan’s Wartime experiences. Mahan spent it waiting “to be concerned in a hell of an attack” but instead being stuck with “the poorest show- nothing but blockading.”¹⁴

Little would change at the conclusion of the War. The Navy stationed Mahan aboard the USS *Muscoota*, where he saw little action in America’s brief encounter with French-occupied Mexico in 1866, and then the navy sent him to the Washington Navy Yard. He spent this time feeling frustrated, depressed and “remembering the pleasant

¹² Mahan, “Letter to Samuel A. Ashe, West Point, July 11, 1870” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume I: 1847-1889*, 355.

¹³ Robert Seager II. *Alfred Thayer Mahan: The Man and His Letters*, (Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 1977), 36, 37-39.

¹⁴ Mahan, “The Diary of Alfred Thayer Mahan Evening, Saturday May 16th, 1868” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume I: 1847-1889*, 90.

(times) of past days, and the fact that they were indeed past-- forever” and wondering “whether he should even remain in the service.”¹⁵ While Mahan would later muse that he was happy enough to see Japan “before it was much improved, while (it remained) sequestered (and) primitive,” his desire to sail aboard the *Iroquois* had more to do with escaping the boredom and misery he was experiencing in North America than it did a genuine interest in Eastern culture.¹⁶

Like most Americans in the 1860s, Mahan knew very little about Tokugawa Japan, and expected to encounter an exotic cultural wasteland. He would not be disappointed; as he would include himself among the American visitors to Japan who concluded that the nation was one where social “evolution and progress had long ago ground to a halt.”¹⁷ After the prolonged civil war of the Fifteenth Century, the Tokugawa government had enacted various policies meant to maintain order that, as one historian noted, was one of the

most conscious attempts in history to freeze society in a hierarchical mold. Every class, every subdivision within it, had its own regulations covering all the minutiae of clothing, ceremony and behavior, which had to be strictly observed on pain of punishment.¹⁸

These policies also severely restricted the influence and contact that other nations would have with Japan, which included the severing of nearly all contact with European states, with the exception of the Netherlands in 1640. It was grossly unprepared to meet the military strength of the West when the USS *Powhatan*, commanded by Commodore

¹⁵Seager, *Alfred Thayer Mahan: The Man and His Letters*, 43. Mahan, “The Diary of Alfred Thayer Mahan Evening, Saturday May 16th, 1868” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume I: 1847-1889*, 160. Seager, *Alfred Thayer Mahan: The Man and His Letters*, 44.

¹⁶ Mahan, *From Sail to Steam: Recollections of Naval Life*, 203.

¹⁷ Henning, *Outposts of Civilization*, 9.

¹⁸ E. Herbert Norman. *Japan's Emergence as a Modern State: Political and Economic Problems of the Meiji Era*, (Westport: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1973), 12.

Matthew Perry, entered Edo bay in July of 1853 demanding Japan open its ports to trade with the United States. Superior Western technology and ingenuity in the form of four ships had forced open a nation of millions. Throughout the 1850s and 1860s, European nations and the United States forced Japan to sign treaties that granted foreign states extraterritoriality over its citizenry in Japan, and the tariff duties that heavily favored foreign traders. This would further destabilize the country. Within 15 years of Perry's arrival, civil war erupted in Japan, causing the downfall of the Tokugawa shogunate, and the ascension of a new government headed by the Meiji emperor that many Japanese believed was more capable of dealing with the West. The aim of the new government was to learn as much as possible about Western science and technology, with the ultimate aim of using these tools to drive the Western states from Japanese shores, and have the government reclaim full sovereignty over the nation.

Mahan's journals and letters make it clear that he did not fully understand the radical transformations that were taking place in Japan at the time he was stationed there. While his works are littered with brief anecdotes about the Civil War that was being waged between Old and New Japan, Mahan devoted a great deal more space in his writings to descriptions of the geographical features of the Japanese countryside and the peculiar people who inhabited it, neither of which he found overly impressive. The Japan he described was not one on the cusp of becoming a modern, powerful state. It was a nation with beautiful mountains, woods, waters, and islets whose scenery and greenery was very similar to the ones found in America. Even the impact that the Japanese had on the land was not overly interesting to Mahan as he noted that, from a distance, the countryside of Japan resembled those found in the eastern United States a hundred years

earlier, with giant fields dotted by farm buildings. Mahan believed that Westerners were “more charmed by the scenery and foliage of Japan from the contrast it affords to the sterile...shores of China, than by any exceeding merit of their own.”¹⁹ The Japan Mahan described was not a dynamic one on the verge of a major historical change. It was a beautiful, yet bland, nation largely untouched by modernity.

The Japanese people were more bizarre than bland. In Mahan’s early writings from Hyogo and Osaka, he compared the Japanese to Westerners if only to emphasize how different they were from their American counterparts. Strange, androgynous, ‘child-like’ people who adorned themselves in weird costumes and painted themselves “worse than Jezebel” filled the ports that the *Iroquois* visited. The appearances of the Japanese often disgusted and confused him. He was repulsed by the married women who blackened their teeth and shaved their eyebrows, while the faces of Yokohama’s young men were “so like girls... (with) generally no hair on their face-- and their cheeks are round fat and rosy, (that until he looked) at the dressing of their hair” he was unsure of their gender. When he did examine the dressing of Japanese men’s hair, he was disturbed by the way in which Japanese shaved the heads of their men and boys, “leaving the backs and side and on the crown gathering it into a little pigtail...which is tied close to the head and then brought over forward.” Mahan could not understand “how any nation ever adopted this barbarous practice.”²⁰ The Japanese, he noted, had peculiar standards of beauty.

¹⁹ Mahan, “Letter to Mary Helena Okill Mahan, Hiogo, Japan, December 29, 1867,” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume I: 1847-1889*, 118; Mahan, “Letter to Jane Leigh Mahan. USS *Iroquois*, Off Osaka, Japan, January 13, 1868,” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume I: 1847-1889*, 123; Mahan, “Letter to Jane Leigh Mahan. USS *Iroquois*, Yokohama, March 21, 1868,” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume I: 1847-1889*, 135-136.

²⁰ Mahan, “Letter to Mary Helena Okill Mahan, Hiogo, Japan, December 29, 1867,” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume I: 1847-1889*, 118; Mahan, “Letter to Jane Leigh Mahan. USS *Iroquois*, Off

Mahan found the religious practices and rituals of the Japanese to be equally peculiar, but throughout his writings, he never seemed overly curious about them. Mahan never describes the festivals he attended in much detail, nor demonstrates that he took much of an effort to find out the meaning behind any of the rituals or celebrations that were a part of them. To him the ceremonies, carnivals and feasts were largely sources of entertainment, enabling him to watch highly superstitious and uncultured peoples worship their pagan deities and engage in bizarre celebrations. They were festivals where men, women and children wore masks and garish costumes, and went “mumming” through the streets of Hyogo and Yokohama in packs of forty or fifty celebrants. They were holidays where people could become lucky by finding a slip of paper or gold coins with the name of a deity inscribed on it in the street, and celebrate this newfound fortune by calling together their friends for a feast. They were times where foreigners like Mahan were welcomed as members of the community, as he was in one celebration where he was the target of a number of married Japanese women who would inexplicably attack him with what resembled a dry mop made of a long stick and feathers.²¹ Mahan merely passed these events off as the bizarre rituals of a pagan and barbaric people; they were entertaining, but not worth investigating in any detail.

Even the fabled marketplaces of Japan did not impress Mahan. When Mahan visited Hyogo, he observed that the Japanese merchants he encountered lacked the shrewdness and experience of their European counterparts. He was disgusted by the peddlers who tried to pass off the inferior goods they were peddling at exorbitant prices,

Osaka, Japan, January 13, 1868,” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume I: 1847-1889*, 123. Mahan, “Letter to Jane Leigh Mahan. USS *Iroquois*, Yokohama, March 21, 1868,” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume I: 1847-1889*, 135-136.

²¹ Mahan, “Letter to Mary Helena Okill Mahan. USS *Iroquois*, Hiogo, January 2nd, 1868,” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume I: 1847-1889*, 120, 123.

asserting that they were products of great quality. The cheap textiles and poorly produced glassware were goods that only the most desperate and gullible of tourists would purchase. While it was possible to encounter a peddler who had a high quality piece of lacquer, such occasions were rare. It was for this reason that Mahan declared that he did not plan to purchase many souvenirs from Japan, as he could “spend with more satisfaction at home” in America.²² He saw no reason for purchasing what he believed to be substandard goods at inflated prices.

Mahan’s notes on the Japanese Civil War of 1867-1868 provide great insight into the soldiers who were warring for control over the state, and how most Western militarists would likely evaluate their abilities. In his letters to his mother, Mahan stated that the diminutive size of the Japanese race, as well as their lack of discipline, made the samurai “appear like boys playing at soldiers.”²³ Mahan’s first encounter with samurai in Hyogo in 1868, or as he referred to them as the “two Sworded fellows,” was notable only for the fact that they were the only people in Hyogo that ever gave Mahan trouble, though only when they were drunk.”²⁴ Later, after having observed various minor skirmishes in Hyogo, and hearing of the others taking place in Osaka, Mahan further concluded that the Land of the Samurai “lacked martial virtues necessary (for) national greatness.”²⁵ They were undisciplined and poorly prepared; and were being defeated by a poorly organized group of rebel soldiers from the renegade provinces of Satsuma and Chōshū that

²² Mahan, “Letter to Mary Hellen Okill Mahan. USS *Iroquois*, Hiogo, January 2nd, 1868,” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume I: 1847-1889*, 119-120; Mahan, “Letter to Mary Hellen Okill Mahan. USS *Iroquois*, Yokohama, March 23, 1868,” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume I: 1847-1889*. 137.

²³ Mahan, “Letter to Mary Hellen Okill Mahan. USS *Iroquois*, Hiogo, February 20, 1868,” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume I: 1847-1889*. 126.

²⁴ Mahan, “Letter to Mary Hellen Okill Mahan. USS *Iroquois*, Hiogo, January 2nd, 1868,” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume I: 1847-1889*. 120.

²⁵ Seager, *Alfred Thayer Mahan: The Man and His Letters*, 54.

appeared “to be composed of bands like the Free Companions of feudal times.”²⁶ Neither side in Japan’s Civil War could claim absolute control over the soldiers that fought for them, Mahan noted, as “even the absolute power of the Daimios (military heads) is liable to be disregarded by some hothead or marauding captain of a troop of ‘Ronins’ or ‘Yakonens.’”²⁷ They would also engage in rather barbaric practices, like abandoning their wounded to die on the battlefield. The manner in which the Japanese engaged in war was utterly callous and lacking the discipline and humanity of their European and American counterparts.

The fact that he had to protect himself while horseback riding in Hyogo, as Japanese soldiers occasionally fired on non-combatants and foreigners while waging their civil war, worried Mahan even more.²⁸ The Japanese were ignorant of the rules of war that most Western nations followed, and Western nations were quick to demand outrageous reparations sums from Japan when it broke them. Mahan described one event where the government gave a commander of Japanese warriors, who had unjustly attacked a group of foreigners, an incredibly barbaric sentence: to disembowel himself by committing hari-kari. Mahan noted that this punishment, though barbaric, was seen by the Japanese as a noble act reserved for only soldiers of a higher rank. The status of these soldiers meant that they “could not simply be beheaded.”²⁹ Mahan did not see this punishment as just: it was merely a savage response to a savage act.

²⁶ Mahan, “Letter to Mary Hellen Okill Mahan. USS *Iroquois*, Hiogo, February 20, 1868,” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume I: 1847-1889* 127.

²⁷ Mahan, “Letter to Mary Hellen Okill Mahan. USS *Iroquois*, Hiogo, February 20, 1868,” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume I: 1847-1889*. 128

²⁸ Mahan, “Letter to Mary Hellen Okill Mahan. USS *Iroquois*, Hiogo, February 20, 1868,” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume I: 1847-1889*, 128, 127.

²⁹ Mahan, “Letter to Mary Helena Okill Mahan. Yokohama, March 11, 1868,” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume I: 1847-1889*, 134.

By the time of his departure from Japan in September of 1869, Mahan's views of the Japanese as an uncultured and child-like people remained unchanged. The very last event that Mahan witnessed while in Japan that had any lasting impression on him was an execution that he attended because he wanted "to see a man's head taken off by one blow of a sword." Mahan only stayed long enough to witness one execution. After seeing the skilled executioner perform the "perfect" lethal blow, Mahan felt "unpleasantly affected" by the macabre spectacle.³⁰ Mahan left Japan further convinced of the superiority of whites to any of the barbaric races he encountered throughout the world.

II.

In the years following Mahan's departure from Japan in September of 1868, the nation underwent a radical restructuring process that completely altered the state's political and economic apparatus. The newly established government, nominally headed by the Meiji emperor, would issue the Charter Oath in April of 1868, including sections that would indubitably have impressed Mahan, namely that:

4. Evil customs of the past shall be broken off and everything based upon the just laws of nature.

5. Knowledge shall be sought throughout the world so as to strengthen the foundations of imperial rule.³¹

The Meiji government had decided that the time had come for the nation to trade in "its Confucian classics for Western technical manuals," and began a more thorough study of the sources of the West's power and wealth.³² By June of 1868, the nation would have its

³⁰ Mahan, "Letter to Samuel A. Ashe. Yokohama, Japan, September 21, 1869," *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume I: 1847-1889*, 350.

³¹ "The Charter Oath," *Sources of Japanese Traditions, Volume II*, ed. Tsunoda, De Bary and Keene (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 137.

³² Barton C Hacker, "The Weapons of the West: Military Technology and Modernization in 19th Century China and Japan," *Technology and Culture* 18, No. 1 (January 1977), 43.

first formal constitution, one based on Western models. Like its American counterpart, the Japanese government would have its own executive, legislative and judicial branches, each with distinct powers and responsibilities. Citizens would enjoy greater freedom under this constitution, as they were encouraged to play a greater role in their government than they had ever been in Japanese history. The new government declared that “deliberative assemblies shall be widely established and all matters decided by public discussion,” and the Japanese people were encouraged to “pursue their own calling” in life.³³ The absolute control that the Tokugawa government held over the Japanese people, which included forbidding citizens from traveling abroad and dictating which career they would pursue in life, was an evil custom that the new Meiji government would not continue.

The Meiji government sought to encourage its brightest citizens to travel throughout the world to gain a greater understanding of the governmental and social institutions of the West. The aim of these delegations, as Prime Minister Ito Hirobumi stated in 1872, was:

To study (the strength of the West so) that, by adopting
(Western institutions and technology, Japan would)
hereafter be stronger... . We shall labor to place Japan on
an equal basis in the future with those countries whose
modern civilization is now our guide.³⁴

³³ “The Charter Oath,” *Sources of Japanese Traditions Volume II*, 137; “The Constitution of 1868,” *Sources of Japanese Traditions Volume II*, 137-139.

³⁴ Roger F. Hackett, “The Meiji Leaders and Modernization: The Case of Yamagata Aritomo,” *Changing Japanese Attitudes Toward Modernization*, Ed. Marius B. Jansen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 245.

Japan's government hoped that by transforming the nation into a modern state on par with the white nations of Europe and North America they would gain the respect of these states, as well as the autonomy Japan had lost when it signed the "unequal treaties" of the 1850s and 1860s under duress. The Meiji government had three aims: first, to develop a military capable of defending the nation from further threats from the West; second, to develop an economy capable of producing the wealth necessary to fund such a military; and third, to build a government that helped produce an educated citizenry capable of developing and maintaining the economy and military.³⁵ Japanese delegations were sent abroad to study various European and North American political, military and economic institutions to learn which aspects of Western society Japan could easily adopt.

Armed with the knowledge acquired on these trips, Japan initiated a series of reforms to its military, civil service, law enforcement education, banking, and transportation systems between 1869 and 1882. The Meiji government also began encouraging the development of Japan's manufacturing and commercial sectors. It created an extensive telegraph system in order to make communication across the country easier. It built railroads connecting the cities of Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto to the deep-water ports of Yokohama and Kobe to facilitate foreign trade. It developed a large merchant marine to carry goods abroad. Japan's government worked laboriously to show the world that it was on the path to becoming a modern state, and was worthy of the respect of the West.³⁶

³⁵ Hideo Ibe, *Japan Thrice Opened: An Analysis of Relations between Japan and the United States* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1992), 54; Hacker, "The Weapons of the West: Military Techniques and Modernization in 19th Century China and Japan.", 52-53.

³⁶ Norman, *Japan's Emergence as a Modern State: Political and Economic Problems of the Meiji Era*, 121-122.

The efforts to transform Japan's pre-modern economy were hampered by the fact that the nation had limited natural resources. Food and textiles still constituted nearly two-thirds of its exports. Japan lacked the minerals and timber that neighboring Manchuria and Korea had in vast quantities, hampering its ability to produce the goods necessary for modernizing the state. Throughout the late nineteenth century, Japan had to look abroad for the goods that it needed to develop its military and manufacturing industries, including most of its navy's and merchant marine's ships.³⁷ In order for Japan to develop into a fully modern state, it would have to become self-sufficient. Japan's government believed it could do so by following the example of the West, and began the acquisition of an overseas empire.

Japan's first major target was a long-standing Chinese protectorate, Korea. The acquisition of Korea would provide Japan with both the resources it required to develop its economy, as well as security. Japan feared that because Korea had a pre-modern military incapable of defending the nation against Western aggressors, either Russia or other European states could easily conquer it. These Western states would then be capable of depriving Japan of the resources it required, and be used as a base from which to stage military attacks on Japan. Japan believed that in order to ensure that Korea would not become the next colonial acquisition of the West, it would have to wrest control of it from China.

In order to garner support from the United States, Japan presented the Sino-Japanese War in 1894-1895 as one waged between civilization and barbarity, and not of Japanese expansion into Asia. Japan fought because it saw in Korea "a reflection of

³⁷ LaFeber, *The Clash: U.S.-Japanese Relations Throughout History*, 46.

(Japan's) own recent past...the Japan of thirty years ago.”³⁸ It saw a nation capable of being groomed into a modern society by Japan, but stifled by its ties to the decaying, barbaric Chinese state. Japan had attempted to position itself as a tutor to Korea, but had constantly been spurned by the Chinese. China feared losing its Korean protectorate, and had meticulously worked to keep Japan from bettering Korea. China had used its sway over the Korean court to force the Korean emperor to sign a treaty with the United States, Britain, France and Germany that the Chinese claimed would guarantee Korean autonomy in 1894, but in reality was merely a smokescreen to keep Japan from influencing the redevelopment of the state. The Chinese had protested again later on in 1894 when Japan intervened to stop a rebellion against the Korean court and sought to pressure Korea to finally undertake serious governmental reform.³⁹ The Japanese argued that the First Sino-Japanese War broke out over China's reluctance to allow progress to take hold in Korea.

The war ended with Japanese “civilization” triumphing over Chinese “barbarity.” Equipped with the tools of the West, Japan was able to dominate and decimate the military forces of the much larger Chinese state. Many American newspapers and military journals largely glossed over allegations that Japan had engaged in war crimes, including the butchering of Chinese civilians at Port Arthur in 1894.⁴⁰ Instead Japan was praised for following such practices as formally issuing a declaration of war in August of 1894, fairly treating non-combatants and foreigners, giving “quarter” to non-resisting

³⁸ Peter Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 53.

³⁹ Jonathan D Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (W. W. Norton and Company; New York, 1990), 22.

⁴⁰ Neil Harris, “All the World a Melting Pot? Japan at American Fairs, 1876-1904” *Mutual Images: Essays in American-Japanese Relations*, Akira Iriye, ed. (Cambridge; Harvard University Press, 1975), 50-51; “The Mikado and the Admiral,” *United Service: A Quarterly Review of Military and Naval Affairs* 15, no. 3 (March 1896): 287-8.

combatants, and properly caring for the injured. This was in direct contrast to the actions of the Chinese, who were accused of such savagery as firing on soldiers who were surrendering, and using weaponry banned under the Geneva convention.⁴¹ Both nations were knowledgeable of the “laws of civilized warfare,” as Japan was a signatory of the Geneva convention, and international law had been studied in academic institutions throughout the Chinese capital. Yet Japan alone had shown itself to be truly civilized on the field of battle.

For the most part, Mahan did not follow the Sino-Japanese War. When asked to comment on it by the English newspaper *The Times*, he gave a rather incoherent interview that highlighted his ignorance of the event.⁴² His later, more informed commentaries were overly critical of the manner in which Japan fought, claiming that the Japanese should have scored a more decisive victory over the Chinese early on in the war given its superior technology, and the fact that it was facing a grossly disorganized Chinese foe. Mahan was not as gracious with praise for the Japanese as were other Americans, and was not as convinced of Japan’s progress. By 1897 Mahan still judged Japan to be a “small and poor state,” not yet as advanced as other Western nations. Yet he did not see Japan as irredeemably barbaric. With time it could emerge as a fully civilized state, but it would do so in a way that few other Westerners could have imagined.⁴³ From Mahan’s writings there would emerge a radical new interpretation of the process of social evolution.

⁴¹ T. E. Holland, “International Law in the War Between China and Japan,” *United Service: A Quarterly Review of Military and Naval Affairs*, Volume 14: 2 (August 1895), 109-113.

⁴² Mahan, “The Battle of the Yalu: An Interview with *The Times*,” London, September 25, 1894, *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume III: 1902-1914*, 583-584.

⁴³ Alfred T. Mahan, “Letter to Theodore Roosevelt, 160 West 86th Street, New York, May 1, 1897,” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume II: 1890-1901* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1975), 506.

In 1900 Mahan published *The Problem of Asia and its Effect upon International Policies*, a work that included some of his most intriguing views on sociology and political philosophy, and their relation to Asia. In a departure from his earlier attitudes Mahan argued that Japan had successfully adopted many of the institutions and technology of Western civilization, radically transforming the primitive state that he had visited in the 1860s into the strongest and most advanced nation in Asia. Now Mahan was greatly impressed by Japan's victory over China in 1895, as it proved that Japan had developed the "martial virtue" that he had previously found the nation to be lacking. Japan's advances and successes were impressive, but also worrisome, as they began to challenge Mahan's long held social evolutionary views.

In *The Problem of Asia and its Effect upon International Policies*, Alfred Mahan began questioning the validity of the model of social evolution espoused by many social Darwinists of his day. He began to doubt that social evolution was the linear process that many claimed it was, and believed that it was somewhat ludicrous to claim that an Eastern society could only become civilized by replicating the accomplishments of the West. To Mahan, civilization was more than just having a democratically elected parliamentary system, or a military armed with the most technologically advanced weaponry. It was more than just parroting the wisdom of Western sages, or replicating Western technology. Mahan believed that Western civilization was the end result of a process that stretched over millennia; it emerged from the accumulation of knowledge and experience of the West over generations, and could not be replicated by others simply by mindlessly emulating Western practices.

Mahan looked to the West's own past for proof. The Teutonic tribes that inhabited Europe in the first few centuries of the common era were as "barbaric" and uncivilized as the people of nineteenth century Asia. They, too, practiced pagan rituals and used primitive instruments of war. When the Teutonic peoples encountered Roman civilization, they met a society that was vastly superior to its own and one that they could benefit from. Romans were skilled architects and engineers; they had mastered the production of buildings that were more structurally sound than anything the Teutons could develop, and had built aqueducts that stretched across the land to provide fresh water to distant cities. The Romans had developed complex governmental and legal systems, and a military capable of conquering nearly all of the Western world. When they began conquering the Teutonic tribes of Europe, the Romans presented themselves as a model of what an advanced civilization resembled. They encouraged the adoption of their technology and ideologies, and pressed the Teutons to emulate Roman society as much as possible.

Yet what emerged in Europe was not a copy of Roman civilization, but a new and advanced Teutonic civilization.⁴⁴ Mahan believed that the Teutonic civilization that emerged was one that disposed of its ancient, irrational, barbaric, and superstitious beliefs and practices, and adopted ones that were scientifically and morally sound. When Teutonic builders adopted the use of the Roman arch in the construction of buildings, they did not do so merely because it was merely because it was a "superior" Roman technique; they did so because it made buildings sturdier. The Teutons developed a more advanced society that had Roman roots, but was nonetheless distinctively Teutonic.

⁴⁴ Alfred T. Mahan. *The Problem of Asia and its Effect upon International Policies* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1900), 108.

Civilization was the result of understanding why certain ideas and technology were superior to others, and understanding how to develop more rational ideas or efficient technology that suited a society's needs. It was completely irrational for a society to merely emulate the ideas or technology of another one simply because the practices of the latter were somehow deemed superior. Mahan believed that Westerners should not expect Japan to emerge as an "Asiatic" version of England or America; they should expect a nation that adopted the aspects of the West that suited its needs, transforming it into a "civilized," yet still distinctively Asiatic Japan.

Mahan believed that the West should neither ignore nor depreciate Japan's

own racial distinctiveness and historic past...(but praise Japan for) having the wisdom to see and associate herself the advantages in a system...foreign to her previous habits.⁴⁵

Japan was following in the footsteps of the West, replacing its archaic governmental institutions and technologies with the more rational and efficient Western ones. Western civilization was a kind of mustard seed that was planted in the "prepared soil" that was Japan; the fruit of this seed did not replace Japanese society, it ameliorated it. What emerged from this soil was not an exact replica of a European state, but rather a distinctively Asian, yet civilized, nation: a "Superior Other."

This transformation would take time, and Mahan refused to acknowledge that Japan had somehow undergone a social evolutionary process in the span of thirty years. While the products of Western civilization were visible, Mahan doubted that the *essence* of Western civilization had truly taken root in Japan. The ideologies and technology that Japan had adopted were still not truly "of herself" yet. Mahan believed that Japan's

⁴⁵ Mahan, *The Problem of Asia and its Effect Upon International Policies*, 148.

growth as a modern state was stunted by the fact that Western civilization had been received too recently and too rapidly. It was too early for Japan to be declared a modern state.⁴⁶

Mahan surmised that the combination of Japan's military strength and its lack of social evolutionary maturity would soon disrupt the established colonial and economic order in Asia. Mahan knew of Japan's desire to expand its empire in Asia and the Pacific, and feared that Japan was considering acquiring the American territories of Hawaii and the Philippines. His solution to this threat to American interests was to propose that America adopt Japan as a kind of "junior partner" in Asia. Since Japan was still militarily weak in comparison to other Western states, it could not yet impose itself as a colonial power on Asia. The lesson of the humiliation Japan had endured in 1895 in the "Triple Intervention," when Russia, France and Germany had forced Japan soon after the Treaty of Shimonoseki to return the Liaotung Peninsula (because of its economic importance as the opening to "the lush markets and mineral wealth of Manchuria"⁴⁷) was that Japan had not yet garnered the respect of other Western nations, and was incapable of asserting itself through the use of military force.⁴⁸ If America was able to incorporate Japan into an economic and political relationship that assured Japan that it would be treated with respect and allowed access to the goods and markets needed to allow Japan to prosper, America could eliminate the threat that a stronger and more frustrated Japan would later

⁴⁶ Mahan, *The Problem of Asia and its Effect Upon International Policies*, 108-109.

⁴⁷ LaFeber, *The Clash: U.S.-Japanese Relations Through History*, 50

⁴⁸ Russia, France and Germany were concerned that Japan's acquisition of the Peninsula would threaten their investments in the region. Believing that Japan lacked the military might necessary to defend its newly-won prize against such a powerful consortium, especially soon after an exhaustive war, the alliance of European states forced Japan to choose between returning the territory to China in exchange for a larger indemnity or risk war with all three states. Since it lacked the military capacity to face all three states, Japan begrudgingly acquiesced to their demands, and began withdrawing its forces from the Liaotung Peninsula on May 5th, 1895 in exchange for an indemnity of 450 million yen.

pose to American interests in Asia.⁴⁹ Japan would be treated with the respect afforded only to strong, Western states, and would eventually emerge as a fully matured, civilized state. In this sense Japan would be adopted by America as a member of the Western “family of nations” for politically and economically pragmatic reasons, but would eventually emerge as a civilized Eastern nation.

This did not mean, however, that Japan would be afforded other rights by America, especially the right for its citizens to emigrate to the United States. Mahan had never been supportive of America introducing another race into its population. Regardless of how civilized or advanced they were, Mahan believed that the Japanese would always retain certain traits that made it impossible for them to fully integrate into American society. In the late 1890s Mahan lobbied for the government to expand the size and strength of the United States Navy, and to formally annex Hawaii in part to eliminate the threat posed by Japanese migration to the islands.

America was not threatened by the influx of Japanese laborers to Hawaii, which had been occurring since the late 1860s, but rather by the Japanese government and military who sought to defend these laborers. Mahan worried that, should Japan feel that its population or economic interests in Hawaii were being threatened or abused, it would be more likely to use military force to ensure their protection. While he was sure that Japan lacked the capacity to do so at the turn of the twentieth century, America also lacked the military presence necessary to ward off the potential threat that Japan may one day pose. In May of 1897 in a private letter to Theodore Roosevelt, then the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Mahan exclaimed that the “crass blindness” of the previous

⁴⁹ Mahan, *The Problem of Asia and its Effect Upon International Policies*, 114-120; Mahan, “Letter to Theodore Roosevelt, 160 West 86th Street, New York, May 1, 1897,” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume II: 1890-1901*, 506.

Cleveland administration had left America's current administration vulnerable by not developing a military capable of defending the islands. Perceived American weakness by the Japanese could lead to a "very real present danger of war" between Japan and the United States. Mahan's solution to avoiding such a conflict was simple: "Preparedness deters the foe."⁵⁰

Mahan believed that the Japanese were best left confined to the lands of Asia. The interests of humanity would best be served if Japan remained in the Orient to elevate the less civilized peoples of Korea and China by serving as an example for them. He again used the metaphor of the mustard seed when explaining Western civilization's influence on Japan and the rest of Asia, claiming that:

the grain of mustard seed, having taken root, (will) spring up and grow to the great tree, the view of which (will) move the continental communities of Asia to seek the same regenerating force for their own renewal.⁵¹

Other Asian states would see the strengths of this newly civilized Japan in the wealth it produced, and the higher standard of living its population had. They would then desire to follow the path to progress that Japan had tread, and undergo a similar process of renewal. Asian migration throughout the West would end, as Japan could send its excess population to further develop the lands of China and Korea, and other Eastern nations would soon be able to use the tools Western civilization provided to properly care for its people.

⁵⁰ Mahan, "Letter to Theodore Roosevelt, 160 West 86th Street, New York, May 1, 1897" *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume II: 1890-1901*, 506; Mahan, "Letter to Theodore Roosevelt, 160 West 86th Street, New York, May 6, 1897," *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume II: 1890-1901*, 507.

⁵¹ Mahan, *The Problem of Asia and its Effect upon International Policies*, 148.

By following these suggestions, Mahan believed that America could develop a needed ally and contain a potential rival in the East. The benefits of the alliance were obvious: America and Japan would prosper, and Asia could be remade into a wealthy, modern, and civilized region. America only needed the will to institute Mahan's plan.

III.

In the years between 1894 and 1905, Alfred Thayer Mahan believed that America had been provided with an opportunity to help bring about a new order in Asia. While Japan had emerged from the First Sino-Japanese War as the most powerful, non-European state in the Orient, it was relatively weak in comparison to other Western powers. The revisions Japan was forced to make to the treaty that ended the Sino-Japanese War by Germany, France and Russia in the so-called "Triple Intervention" demonstrated to the world that while Japan had undergone an incredible modernization process, it had yet to garner the respect of the West or the military power necessary to defend itself against the West's aggression. Mahan believed that America could have used this occasion to present Japan with a rare opportunity: to align itself with the British and Americans by co-operating in the opening of Asia, and allowing fair access to all of the wealth of resources the continent offered.⁵² In this relation Japan would be treated with the respect it so craved from the Western powers. It would be allowed to compete for the materials and markets it required for the further development of its economy. It could ensure Japan's national security by preventing other colonial powers from gaining a foothold in the region, and using China or Korea as bases from which to attack Japan. Japan could also help bring about the regeneration of China and Korea by aiding its neighbors in becoming modern nations, which Japan had previously stated was one of its

⁵² Mahan, *The Problem of Asia and its Effect Upon International Policies*, 109.

reasons for acquiring control over Korea. The nations of Asia would eventually be integrated into the Teutonic economic model, and be capable of repelling imperialists themselves. America could also eliminate the possibility of a frustrated and expansionist Japan arising, aiming to acquire America's Pacific territories and threaten American interests in China.

Yet Mahan believed it vital that Japan never be led to believe that it was to be treated as if it were a Western power. Japan was an Asian partner of the West, not an honorary member of the white race. His reasons for extending Japan the respect it craved had more to do with geopolitical pragmatism than it did American benevolence. By integrating Japan into a political and economic order in which America was the prime operator and benefactor while Japan was still weak, it would allow America greater control over Japan. America could guarantee Japan access to the Asian markets that the other Western powers were quickly devouring, as the combined force of the British, Japanese and the Americans could easily repel other expansionists. Further Japanese immigration to the United States, and the threat of Japan acquiring American territories in the Pacific, two major fears of many in America, would be halted. The Japanese would not have an incentive to expand if it knew its access to markets and resources was secure, and knew that it would be foolish to antagonize their allies by allowing their citizens to migrate to the West. By recognizing the Japanese as a partner of the Americans and British in Asia, the two Western nations would acquire a willing ally and a greater guarantee of peace and prosperity for all involved in the alliance. Instead, the United States squandered this opportunity, which resulted in Japan becoming an aggressive and bitter neighbor.

America's first opportunity to garner the trust of the Japanese occurred at the conclusion of the Sino-Japanese War. Japan had emerged triumphant over the once great Chinese state, having bested it both at sea and on land. Throughout the nation, Japanese citizens took great pride in their military's achievement. While most of its Asian neighbors languished under colonial rule, Japan alone had mastered the technology of the West and emerged as a small, yet powerful, nation. On April 17, 1895 Japan stood poised to reap the rewards of its military victory. In the Treaty of Shimonoskei, Japan demanded from the Chinese a \$135 million indemnity, the ceding of any control China had over the kingdom of Korea, the island of Formosa, the Pescadores archipelago, and the Liaotung Peninsula. America was supportive of Japan's acquisition of the Chinese territories, as Japan would continue to recognize America's Most-Favored-Nation status there, guaranteeing it the right to compete for Chinese markets and resources. These spoils of war would be used to further develop the nation's military and industrial sectors, and provide Japan with the raw materials the nation sorely lacked. The nation of Japan could now boast that it was the most powerful state in the Orient.

Japan's celebrations would prove to be short lived however. Within seven days of signing the Treaty of Shimonoseki, in what came to be known as the Triple Intervention, Germany, France and Russia forced Japan to cede the Liaotung Peninsula back to China or face war. The Japanese were incensed as the Triple Intervention had not only cost Japan Chinese territory they regarded as crucial, but had also endangered Japan's control over its other acquisitions. It had shown Japan to be weak, and that its actions were subject to the approval of other Western powers. Also, Korea's leaders saw a way of exploiting Japan's weakness for their own benefit, as they could "fend off Japanese

pressure by appealing for help to the West.”⁵³ The Americans, who were among Japan’s most ardent supporters during the war, remained silent during the Intervention. Their interests in China were not threatened by the actions of the Western aggressors.⁵⁴ By remaining on the sidelines during the Triple Intervention, America had shown itself to be a fair-weather friend of Japan.

The Japanese were further infuriated when the alliance proceeded to carve up Japan’s newly won territory amongst themselves, and acquire Chinese territories Japan had interests in. In 1897, for example, Russia negotiated a twenty-five year lease with China of a naval base situated on the Liaotung Peninsula, giving Russia greater access to Manchuria and a base from which to launch a possible incursion into Japanese-controlled Korea. In that same year Germany obtained Tsingtao and Kiaochan Bay, a major port in the eastern Shantung Peninsula, as an indemnity after two of its missionaries were killed in China. Even France attempted to widen its sphere of influence in South China at this time. Japan was watching its Chinese neighbor being slowly devoured by the Western powers, and was growing anxious.

Between 1898 and 1904, Japan grew more fearful of European expansionism in China. It looked on in dread when in 1900 Russia sent 100,000 troops to occupy Manchuria in response to the damaging of the Chinese Eastern line of the Trans-Siberian Railway by Chinese citizens⁵⁵ who were swept up in the anti-foreign spirit of the Boxer

⁵³ Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910*, 97.

⁵⁴ LaFeber, *The Clash: U.S.-Japanese Relations Throughout History*, 50-51.

⁵⁵ The Boxer Rebellion (1898-1900) was a failed Chinese populist revolt that aimed to expel Western influence from China. The Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists (a sect founded in the Shandong province of China known as Boxers by Westerners) led the rebellion with the intention of expelling the Western imperialists and missionaries whom they believed were destroying Chinese society. When a coalition of Boxers and Chinese imperial forces began attacking Western missionaries, diplomats and foreign nationals, as well as besieging the Western embassies in June of 1900, an Eight-Nation Alliance made up of European powers, the United States and Japan, was founded to quell the rebellion and protect

Rebellion.⁵⁶ Japan believed this act was a ploy Russia was using to amass troops on Korea's northern border in order to strike at the state. Japan took measures to ensure it would not endure another humiliation like it had in 1895, including forming an alliance with Britain in 1902. Under the terms of this alliance, the British would come to Japan's aid if one or more powers joined with Russia in a war against Japan. The alliance served to bolster Japan's resolve to defend its colonies and territories of interest against Russia, and Japan began preparing for what seemed like an inevitable confrontation with the Tsarist state.⁵⁷ In February of 1904, the long anticipated war between Russia and Japan finally began.

At the onset of the war, Japan surprised the world by using strategy and speed to compensate for its smaller naval fleet, using a surprise attack to destroy much of Russia's Pacific fleet before the declaration of war had been formally received by the Tsar's government. Japan would continue to amass victories on the battlefield until finally, in 1905, the two nations were lured to the negotiation table to finally resolve the conflict. Russia had been weakened by both the decimation of much of its military by Japanese forces, and by a revolt by its own people against the crown in 1905. Japan had sacrificed a great deal for its victory, and was eager to receive the large indemnity and territory it felt it was due from the Tsar. Japan expected a great deal from the American-negotiated Treaty of Portsmouth that would end the Russo-Japanese war.

their citizens residing in China. The Boxer were soundly defeated by their better-armed Western foe and the Rebellion formally ended with the signing of the **Treaty of 1901, Peace Agreement between the Great Powers and China.**

⁵⁶ LaFeber, *The Clash: U.S.-Japanese Relations Throughout History*, 77-78.; Richard Storry, *Japan and the Decline of the West in Asia 1894-1943* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), 60-63.

⁵⁷ Merze Tate and Fidele Foy, "More Light on the Abrogation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance," *Political Science Quarterly* 74, No. 4 (December 1959), 532.

Yet the Japanese would again be robbed of their spoils of war. While their control of Korea was guaranteed, and Russia agreed to cede them a number of major ports in Manchuria, Japan was denied the large indemnity it had expected. Many Westerners were afraid that, by awarding Japan a large indemnity, they would be replacing a Russian hegemon in the region with a Japanese one. Theodore Roosevelt noted that his aim at the peace conference was not to ruin Russia financially, nor to provide Japan the resources it required to be capable of dominating the region. In 1904 he had worried that a Japanese victory over Russia would mark the emergence of “a great new force in Eastern Asia....If, moreover, Japan seriously starts in to reorganizing China and makes headway, there will result in a real shifting of the centre of equilibrium as far as the white races are concerned.”⁵⁸ Roosevelt was not prepared to hand Japan the tools it needed to dominate the region, and worked to ensure that an indemnity was not included in the treaty.

The Japanese nonetheless remained adamant that the indemnity be included, resulting in further attempts by Roosevelt to get the Japanese delegation to concede. Flustered, Roosevelt reminded them that “ethically... Japan owes a duty to the world at this crisis. The civilized world looks to her to make peace...let her show her leadership in matters ethical no less than matters military.”⁵⁹ Browbeaten, the delegation finally dropped their demands. The treaty was signed, Roosevelt would be awarded the Nobel Peace prize for his role in the affair, and the Japanese delegation returned home to a incensed nation.

⁵⁸ LaFeber, *The Clash: U.S.-Japanese Relations Throughout History*, 80; Theodore Roosevelt, *The letters of Theodore Roosevelt, Volume IV*, Ed. Elting E. Morison (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951-1954), 1231.

⁵⁹ Edmund Morris, *Theodore Rex* (The Modern Library: New York, 2001), 413.

The Treaty of Portsmouth signaled a major turning point in American-Japanese relations. America could no longer expect Japan to be the willing ally of the West in Asia that Mahan had wanted it to become; America had never given it an incentive to be one. Instead, Mahan saw Japan emerge from the conference as a frustrated and dangerous power. America had squandered its opportunity to contain the Japanese threat and it would now have to deal with the consequences of this failure.

IV.

After the signing of the Treaty of Portsmouth in August of 1905, anti-peace riots began to break out on the streets of Tokyo. The failure to include an indemnity in the treaty left the Japanese public furious and spiteful. Businesses hung mourning crepe in their windows, and throngs of people amassed in public areas to decry the injustice their country had just suffered. Crowds eager to seek revenge on the nation that had short-changed the Japanese at the peace conference destroyed American-owned property and attacked American residents. In one street, a roar of approval erupted from the crowd when a poster was displayed, depicting the severed heads of a Japanese representative present at the treaty's signing and the American president. Japan was shortchanged by the West at the peace conference again after having been victorious on the field of battle.⁶⁰

Japanese discontent would spread beyond its shores to those of America's west coast. Around the turn of the twentieth century, California's white labor unions began lobbying the government to stem the flow of Japanese labor into America. The unions argued that Japanese laborers depressed American wages, as they were willing to do the same work as their American counterparts for less money. In 1905, the California

⁶⁰ LaFeber, *The Clash: U.S.-Japanese Relations Throughout History*, 84. Mahan, "Letter to Bouverie F. Clark. Slumberside, Quogue, Long Island, September 11, 1908." *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume III: 1902-1914*, 263.

legislature agreed with the unions' claim that the Japanese were a social pariah, further noting, "Japanese immigrants contribute nothing to the growth of the state. They add nothing to its wealth and they are a blight on the prosperity of it."⁶¹ This characterization infuriated the Japanese, as did the fact that the San Francisco school board ordered the segregation of Japanese and other Asian schoolchildren due to a lack of space in the city's schools following the great San Francisco earthquake of 1906. Many Japanese believed that the discrimination their compatriots faced in California was unjustifiable. Well aware of the horrible treatment of their compatriots in America, editors of a major Tokyo newspaper asked a question on the mind of many of their fellow Japanese: "Why do we not insist on sending (war) ships" to avenge Japan's honor?⁶² It was indeed possible that war would break out between America and Japan over America's treatment of Japanese citizens.

Mahan's response to this situation was to warn Americans about Japan. He wrote to America's political and military elites, as well as major American newspapers, arguing that America was grossly unprepared to meet the challenge Japan now posed to it, and that the government had to act. Mahan's acclaim as one of America's leading naval theorists had gained him audiences with various high-ranking political officials and journalists in America and abroad, including President Theodore Roosevelt, the British Naval Officer Bouverie F. Clark and Leopold Maxse, the editor of the British *National Review*. In these letters, he argued that America must end the flow of Japanese migration to American shores, as they were inviting an inassimilable race into the country. Mahan

⁶¹Fred H. Matthews. "White Community and 'Yellow Peril.'" *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*. 50, No. 4. (March 1964), 614. Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at home and Abroad, 1876-1917*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 83-84.

⁶² LaFeber, *The Clash: U.S.-Japanese Relations throughout History*, 89.

again asserted that Japan was not the barbaric nation of ‘coolies’ that California’s white labor unions characterized them as, but rather a more dangerous threat. Japan had proven in their wars against China and Russia that they were quite adept at wielding the tools and weaponry of Western civilization, and if provoked, could wield them against the United States. If the Japanese government believed America was mistreating Japanese immigrants, there was a very real potential that the Japanese state would intervene on their behalf. To prevent this from occurring, America had to close the door to Japanese immigration and develop a military capable of keeping that door closed.

Mahan was adamant that he opposed Japanese immigration because he believed that they were inassimilable, and because he viewed them as uncivilized. He argued that

It is not a question of superior or inferior races, but of races wholly different in physical get up and in traditions wholly separate during all time, up to half a century ago.⁶³

The adoption of Western civilization had not destroyed Japan’s strong national and racial character, one with “virile qualities” that were capable of withstanding assimilation into American society. Mahan still claimed that Japan had emerged as a civilized Asian state, one that had elements of Western civilization, but it was not a Western state. The Japanese still lacked the “promise of ready adaptability to the spirit of our institutions which would render naturalization expedient,” and if allowed to settle in America, the Japanese would remain a “homogenous foreign mass, naturally acting together,

⁶³ Mahan, “Letter to Leopold J. Maxse, Slumberside, Quogue, Long Island, July 30, 1907,” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume III: 1902-1914*, 221.

regardless of (America's) national welfare.”⁶⁴ The Japanese lacked the sociological tools necessary to be Americans.

Mahan worried that, between the end of the Russo-Japanese War and the First World War, much of the American public was unaware of the problem that they now faced. Japanese immigration was not merely a labor problem, or one restricted to the west coast. By allowing the inassimilable Japanese into America, the nation was creating another “race problem” for itself. America had had to cope with the millions of blacks that resided within its borders, as the nation had not yet resolved how to integrate them into American society. Mahan consistently argued in both private letters to the editor Leopold Maxse in 1907, and publicly in an editorial published later in 1913 in *The Times*, that he could not understand why so many Americans were so willing to repeat the mistake of their forbearers, allowing another inassimilable race to take root in America. He continuously argued that the supporters of Japanese immigration were repeating the mistake of many abolitionists prior to the Civil War in “unconsciously assuming” that the Japanese, like “the negro, was a white man with the accident of (dark) skin.”⁶⁵ Treating the Japanese as such was dangerous, leading Mahan to predict in 1907 and 1910 that if America did not end Japanese immigration immediately, the American continent west of the Rockies could soon be completely Asiatic. He would similarly warn former President Theodore Roosevelt four years later that if Japanese immigration was “permitted, the Pacific slope would be an Asian territory in twenty years.” Mahan’s message between

⁶⁴ Mahan, “To the Editor of *The Times*, Quogue, Long Island, circa June 13, 1913,” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume III: 1902-1914*, 498.

⁶⁵ Mahan, “Letter to Leopold J. Maxse, Villa Albion, Bad Nauheim, May 30, 1907,” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume III: 1902-1914*, 214; Mahan “Letter to Leopold J. Maxse, Slumberside, Quogue, Long Island, July 30, 1907,” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume III: 1902-1914*, 222; Mahan, “Letter to Bouverie F. Clark, Lawrence, Long Island, March 10, 1910,” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume III: 1902-1914*, 334; Sidney L. Gulick. *The American-Japanese Problem: A Study of the Racial Relations of the East and West* (New York: Charles Scribner’s & Sons, 1914), 224.

1907 and 1913 was consistent: if America tolerated their immigration, the Japanese could literally divide the country along racial lines.⁶⁶

Declaring Japanese immigration illegal would not necessarily stop the problem. America had to develop a stronger military than it already possessed, one capable of intimidating the battle tested Japanese forces. Mahan wrote to the British naval officer Bouverie F. Clark that the American government was underestimating the threat that Japan posed, believing that the Japanese did not have the will to fight. Mahan argued that this strategy was both lazy and foolish: While the military and government may not have had the will to fight, the Japanese public would not tolerate the limiting of their “right” to immigrate to the West. The Japanese government would have to choose between risking war abroad or being unpopular at home. Mahan believed that the government would inevitably bow to the will of the people if the conditions were right. America had to prepare for the possibility of a war erupting between the two nations.

V.

In the years following the Russo-Japanese War Alfred Thayer Mahan believed that the clash of Western and Japanese civilization would lead to a military conflict. In 1911, Mahan made one of his most important contributions to America’s naval policy when he was asked to comment on the Naval War College’s Strategic War Plan, America’s course of action in a potential war with Japan. While the Navy was planning for a conflict with Japan over America’s territories in the Pacific, Mahan feared that Japan’s initial target in any war would likely be America’s Pacific Coast.

⁶⁶ Mahan, “To the Editor of *The Times*, Quogue, Long Island, circa June 13, 1913,” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume III: 1902-1914*, 497-499; Mahan “Letter to Theodore Roosevelt, University Club, New York, December 2, 1911,” *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume III: 1902-1914*, 436.

Mahan believed that the next war would be between the United States and Japan and would be fought over the issue of immigration. The Japanese were willing to tolerate the abuse suffered of its citizenry in the American mainland only so long as it lacked the military capacity to affect change. Japan's victory over Russia demonstrated that it now had the capacity to engage other Western powers, and would likely do so when Japan felt that the interests of its citizenry were threatened. Mahan's greatest fear was of Japanese naval ships appearing off America's west coast. If Japan was able to break through America's naval defenses, it would have a battle-tested army that would invade the west coast and begin operating in the United States. America lacked an army capable of meeting the Japanese threat, meaning that in the event of a successful Japanese landing on America's west coast the "American continent West of the Rockies may be Asiatic."⁶⁷ Mahan aimed to eliminate this possibility through his contributions to the Strategic War Plan.

The Strategic War Plan arose out of a larger military strategy that had been in development since 1904, when a coalition of high-ranking American military and naval officers known as the Joint Army-Navy Board set about designing war plans in preparation for a war between the United States and Japan. They feared that if Japan emerged victorious over Russia, it would then turn its attention towards America. Equipped with modern armaments, and bolstered by its victory over a western power, Japan would seek to acquire America's Pacific territories, with the Philippines likely being Japan's first target. The Board believed that at the onset of this war America's

⁶⁷ Mahan, "Letter to Philip Andrews, Marshmere, Quogue, Long Island, September 24, 1910," *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume III: 1902-1914*, 355; Mahan, "Letter to Bouverie F. Clark. University Club, New York, March 12, 1912," *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume III: 1902-1914*, 447-8.

Navy would be stationed in the Caribbean and have to travel around South America to arrive in the Pacific. America needed naval bases in Hawaii and Guam to secure the fleet's line of communication as it traveled from the Caribbean to the Philippines. Once the fleet arrived in the Philippines, the American army would engage the Japanese on land while the American navy battled the Japanese navy for control of the Pacific.⁶⁸

In 1911 the U.S. Navy expanded its war plan to include a Japanese attack on all of America's Pacific territories. Japan would begin the war, military analysts believed, by sending a force of 100,000 soldiers to acquire the Philippines, Samoa, Hawaii and Guam. America would begin the war seriously handicapped, as its naval fleet was stationed on the Atlantic seaboard. The lack of an Isthmian canal would hamper America's travel to the Pacific, and America's Pacific islands would fall to Japan's forces while the Navy was still rounding South America. Japan would use this time to fortify America's territories and prepare itself for an American onslaught.

The Navy produced two plausible means of counterattack. The first involved attempting to reacquire its lost territories of Guam and Hawaii before heading westward to set up a blockade around Japan. The Navy expected that it would sustain a high number of casualties when doing so, as Japan had enough time to fortify the islands by the time the U.S. Navy would arrive. It favored instead a second plan, where the American navy and army began its counterattack in the southern Philippines. The U.S. Army and Navy would pursue the Japanese by land and sea, capturing Japan's base of operations in the north, and then move on to engage Japan's forces in their own Pacific territories, Taiwan and the Pescadores. America would then sever Japan's lines of trade

⁶⁸ Louis Morton, "War Plan Orange: Evolution of a Strategy" *World Politics* 11, No.2 (January 1959), 222-223.

and communication, while enlisting China and Russia to enter the war on America's side. The duo would further humiliate and weaken the minute nation that had so deftly defeated them in 1895 and 1905 respectively, bringing the war to an end.⁶⁹

Mahan was approached to comment on the plans, as he was still considered both an expert in American-Japanese relations and one of the top naval strategists and historians in the world. Mahan's response focused on three key beliefs: That America needed a significant naval presence on its Atlantic and Pacific shores; secondly, that America needed to fortify its Pacific holdings; and thirdly, that America needed to build the Isthmian canal in Panama as quickly as possible. America could not waste valuable time traveling around South America while its Pacific territories were under siege. America had to address these needs before it could properly plan a defense against the Japanese.⁷⁰

In 1911 the Isthmian canal did not look like it would be completed in the near future, and Mahan turned his attention to a more practical aim: fortifying America's Pacific territories. He believed that it was in America's best interests to build its war plans around Guam, as Japan would not "attempt an invasion of the Pacific Coast, or of Hawaii, nor...the Philippines, with a superior or equal American navy securely based upon a point only a thousand miles from its coasts."⁷¹ In the chance that a war did break out between the two nations, a fortified Guam would keep the Japanese at bay until

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Edward S. Miller, *War Plan Orange: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan, 1897-1945* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2007), 70-74; Mahan, "To Raymond P. Rogers, Lawrence, Long Island, February 22, 1911," *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume III: 1902-1914*, 380-388; Seager, *Alfred Thayer Mahan: The Man and His Letters*, 482-489.

⁷¹ Mahan, "Letter to Philip Andrews, Marshmere, Quogue, Long Island, September 24, 1910," *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan Volume III: 1902-1914*, 356.

American reinforcements arrived. The U.S. Navy agreed with Mahan's conclusions and enlisted him as a consultant on how best to fortify the island.

With Guam fortified and America developing a significant military presence on its west coast, Mahan's clash of civilizations thus became a clash of military might. The rights of the Superior Other would now be defined by what Japan could extract through the threat of force, and what America was willing to concede in order to avoid war. America could no longer expect that its borders and economic interests in Asia were protected by Gentlemen's Agreements or treaties like the Root-Takahira Agreement. Mahan believed that an imposing military presence in the Pacific was all that kept America from being swamped by Japanese immigrants and China open to American trade.

VI.

At the turn of the twentieth century America squandered a rare opportunity. At a time where the United States lacked the military capacity to challenge the European imperialists for access to the mythical Chinese market, the Japanese emerged as a potential partner in rebuilding Asia into a continent that was open to the free trade of American goods and ideas. Japan simply asked for the same rights and respect that America afforded other civilized nations. Yet instead of embracing Japan, America spurned it. While Alfred Thayer Mahan was one of the few to argue that it was in America's best interests to recognize both Japan's ability to adopt various Western institutions and ideologies and its distinct culture, and embrace Japan as a Superior Other, most white Americans would not. The Japanese did not fit the stereotype of what most

white Americans interpreted a civilized society to be, and they were unwilling to alter their beliefs. Their dismissal of the Japanese as being too foreign and barbaric to be a valued ally led to the tensions that defined American-Japanese relations for much of the early half of the twentieth century.

While Mahan's *Superior Other* thesis provides further insight into how Americans struggled to come to terms with countries that challenged their social evolutionary beliefs, historical scholarship would benefit from a study that explores how Japan and America attempted to negotiate Japan's social evolutionary status. Mahan was proof that there were Americans who were willing to allow the Japanese to define what a non-white, non-Christian civilization was. Across the Pacific there were many Japanese who believed that the ability to define who was civilized was not the exclusive right of the social Darwinists and advocates of scientific racism. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Japanese scholars like Fukuzawa Yukichi, whose writings called for the reform of governmental and social institutions by modeling them after their Western counterparts;⁷² and Mori Arinori, one of the most important reformers of the Japanese education system who advocated building it on Western models, and for replacing the Japanese language with English;⁷³ all struggled to create a "civilized" Japan. The Japan they envisioned bore striking similarities to Mahan's *Superior Other*, as it was the product of Eastern culture combined with Western science. By comparing these models, historians would gain a better understanding of the clash of American and Japanese civilizations that Mahan envisioned early-twentieth century American-Japanese relations to be.

⁷² Yukichi Fukuzawa, *The Autobiography of Yukichi Fukuzawa*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 246-247.

⁷³ Ivan Parker Hall, *Mori Arinori* (Lincoln: Iuniverse, 1999), 186-187, 189-195.

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